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(Second Edition.)

# BRIGHT STORY READERS.

Grade III.



# THE HERMIT OF SVARTNES

By

S. J. TOMKINS.

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# THE HERMIT OF SVARTNES.

(Pronounced Svart-ness. *Svart = black.*)



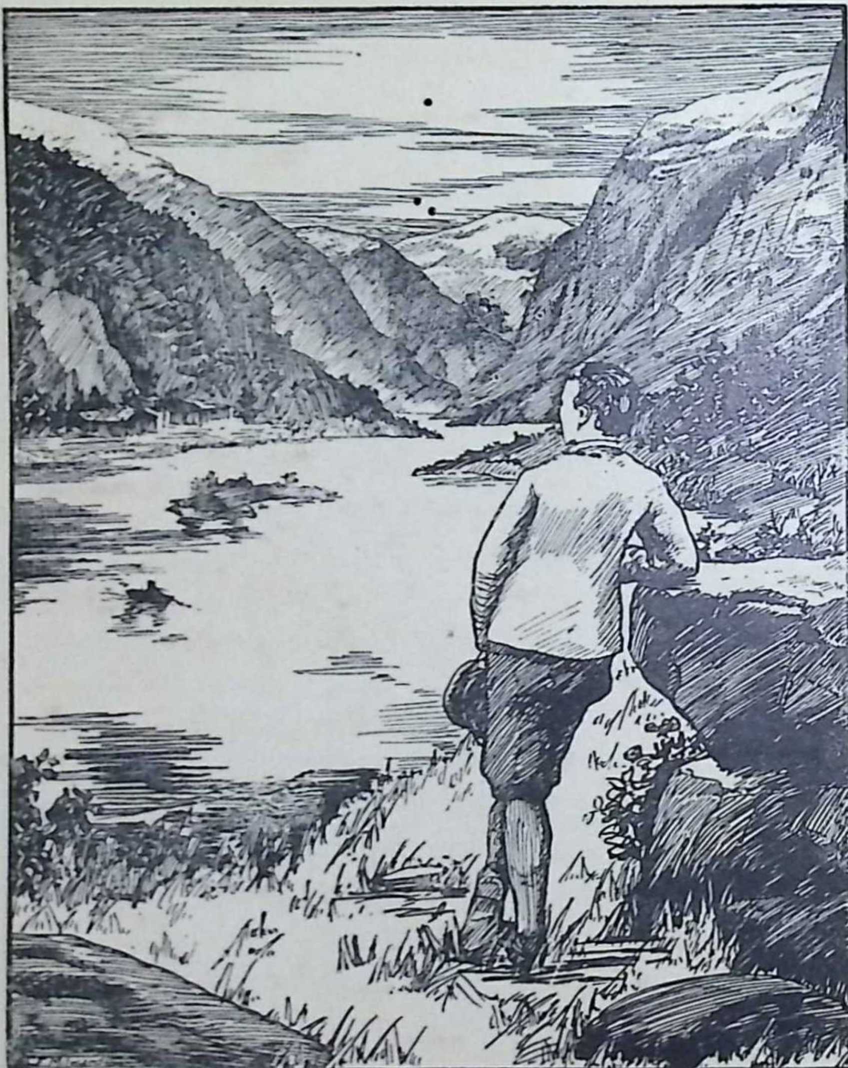
## CHAPTER I.

### THE HERMIT.

ONCE upon a time, not a very long time ago, in a dark pine forest, in that country of lonely lake, of fjord and fell, the Land of the Midnight Sun, there dwelt an old man.

He lived all alone in a little wooden hut, which he had built of the pine-wood.

No one knew when, or how, he came there, for rarely does the peasant who lives on the outskirts of the forest, think of penetrating into its gloom and darkness. Few people had seen him, and only one had heard him speak. This was a young fisherman named Stefan, who, one evening in late spring, wishing to reach the edge of the fjord before nightfall, and thinking to take a short cut through the forest, lost his way. Seeing smoke issuing from the log-hut, he made up his mind to seek direction. As he neared the rough entrance, he heard a voice raised as if in earnest prayer.



'He had not long to wait before another fisherman joined him.'—*Page 4.*

" O, thou Earth-goddess ! thou that givest, and thou that takest away, thou that hidest in thy bosom all that we held dear, send him back. Send him back, so that I may clasp him once more in my arms and the curse be removed from my lips, before thou takest me to thyself."

The voice ceased. The young fisherman heard a deep sigh, then a sound as of crackling twigs, then of shuffling steps advancing towards the entrance, and a striking figure stood before him. It was that of an old man, but erect and straight as his own, and the young fisherman thought he had never seen such a sad, though proud face.

The old man looked at him in surprise, and, though his lips did not move, his eyes asked him what he wanted.

" I beg your pardon, sir, but I have lost my way. I want to get to the water on the other side of the wood before nightfall."

The old man looked kindly, but fixedly, at him, and, stretching out his long thin arm, pointed with his forefinger towards the setting sun. His eyes said, " That is the way," but his lips were pressed firmly together. The fisherman thanked him, and then the old man slightly bent his head and withdrew into the hut.

Following the direction given him, Stefan reached the water's edge just in time to see the sun dip into the sea. He had not long to wait before another fisherman, whom he addressed as Rolf, joined him in a small fishing-boat, and they set out to tempt the waters, and to spend three or four hours in that sport which is so dear to the heart of the "hardy Norseman."

# CHAPTER II.

## THE VISION.

Meanwhile Johan (for that was the name of the old man) had re-entered the dark hut, and sat down on a rough stool, which also had been knocked together out of the pine-logs. His elbows rested on his knees, his chin sank into his hands, and his eyes were fixed on the glowing embers.

And what did he see?

He saw himself, as a boy, wandering with another boy—his brother, Sven, two years his senior—over the mountains they both loved so dearly. He saw his father, as he lay dying, take his hand and place it in that of his brother, and he seemed to hear his father say,

"Sven, the land I leave behind will be yours. But, for the love of the mother who bore you and of the father who has reared you, be true to each other; and should Johan need a helping hand, do not withhold it from him."

"You know you may trust me, father," Sven had said.

Then he saw his brother grown up to manhood, tall and handsome, but with a touch of care on his

brow that did not belong to his years. The land inherited was stony and barren ; though the brothers had spent much time and toil—and the elder the whole of his inheritance—it had been in vain.

Then the temptation had come to him and had been too strong for him ; the temptation, the result of which had branded Johan as a traitor for the rest of his life.

He possessed a rare gift, by means of which he discovered that his brother's land was rich in silver.

The demon of greed had taken possession of him, and the love of his parents and the great love of his brother had counted for nought. He saw himself approaching his brother and offering to purchase his land, and Sven, worn out with work and worry, had sold his birthright for a trifling sum.

As soon as the land had passed into his possession, he had sunk a mine, and the mineral buried there had surprised even Johan. During the years that followed he had reaped the harvest of this mine and had become a very rich man. But when Sven had realized how he had been betrayed by the man to whom he would have given his last crust, he had disappeared and gone no man knew whither.

Then Johan saw a tall, fair girl, who also had loved

him and had become his wife, but his thirst for wealth had so taken hold upon him that he had neglected her, and, after a year, she had given him a son and then passed out of his life.

Then he saw his little Olaf growing out of childhood into manhood, until one day he had faced his father with the charge of having knowingly robbed his brother and driven him from his inheritance, and he seemed to hear his boy's voice saying,

"Father, I will not live on this land. I cannot take what is not mine. I will travel the whole world over, and will not rest until I have found Sven and brought him again, that we may give him back his own."

The lad had gone, and for a time the man had been so wrapped up in his schemes that he had not given himself time to consider what he had done.

Then, one glorious evening in autumn, when all Nature seemed to be making her final effort before retiring to hide herself in her winter garb, he sat alone. The evening was warm, so he strolled out on to the terrace overlooking his grounds. He walked on, until he came to a seat which had been placed where he could gaze down the long avenue of beech-trees leading to his mansion. Being tired,

he sat down, but, instead of his mind being occupied with mines, silver, and so forth, his thoughts wandered out to those who had gone from him.

The dead leaves were lying around him, and, looking at them, he thought of how short-lived they were—that only a few weeks ago they had been beautiful in their infant green. Now they were dead, and just waiting to be swept up and burnt. He thought of his own life, and his eyes became fixed on the tallest and most perfect of the beech-trees. Its gorgeous colours shone out—red, bronze, shading down to the most delicate green and gold.

This tree seemed to fascinate him, and as he gazed fixedly at it, the branches slowly assumed the form of a woman of unusual size, decked in diamonds, and emeralds, and rubies. She was a mass of jewels, each of which glistened with a lustre all its own, and her eyes shone like stars. The form did not move, but as he gazed in amazement, he heard a voice in clear and commanding tones, saying,

" I am the Goddess of the Earth. Take heed, Johan. Thou hast sinned against thyself, for thou hast robbed thyself of love—first thy brother, then thy wife, and last of all thy son. But it is not yet too late. Thou canst regain what thou hast lost.

But thou must leave this land that is not thine, thou must forsake this home that thou hast purchased with thy brother's wealth, and thou must go where thou canst be alone with Nature and with thy conscience. Thy lips shall be sealed to thy fellow-men, until the wrong thou hast done shall be righted, and Sven, thy brother, restored to his own."

At these words Johan arose and advanced towards the wonderful vision, but as he neared it, a flash, as of lightning, appeared from a cloud overhead, and he fell to the ground with the voice ringing in his ears.

For three months he lay unconscious, and then, gradually, he regained his memory, but never attempted to speak. He had lost all desire for riches or splendour; but the longing for his boy was almost more than he could bear.

His old nurse told him that he had been found lying near the beech avenue, and for weeks they had feared that he would die.

On regaining consciousness, he made signs that he wanted pen and paper, and wrote down certain requests upon which he insisted. These were to leave everything he had most prized—his mines, his home—in charge of a trusted secretary, and to travel

in his rowing-boat, taking with him only his old nurse, her husband, and his faithful hound, Rap, to this lonely and dark forest, which was situated on an arm of the beautiful S—— Fjord.

It was early in April; the days were growing longer and warmer, and they lived in this boat until he and the old man had built the wooden hut of pine-logs. They had brought with them the necessary tools—the old servant had seen to that—and Nature supplied them with food and drink.

The cares and needs of this new manner of life occupied Johan's mind to such an extent that quite a new interest was awakened in him, and as the spring and summer passed, his mind and body were completely restored: but he never spoke.

Many of his wishes were anticipated by the old people, and his gratitude shone in his eyes. A year passed in this way, and then the old man died, leaving the old nurse alone to look after him. Then she died also, and he was left with only Rap, his dumb and faithful companion.

When the young fisherman passed his hut, Johan had just dug a little grave and buried his last friend, Rap. Then he had felt that his heart would break, for there came to him such an overpowering sense

of loneliness and longing for his boy, his only son, divided from him by his own dishonesty. He knew that not yet was his penance complete, for he could never forgive himself. But, oh ! if only the Goddess who had condemned him to banishment would help him to find the boy, and then—dared he hope it ?—his lost brother, Sven !

He had dropped to his knees and uttered the prayer overheard by Stefan. When he beheld the young man and heard him asking direction to the sea, he longed to speak to him, and to seek sympathy. But no, not yet ! And after he had pointed towards the sunset and sped him on his way, the old man felt doubly alone.

Then these memories crowded upon him, and he wondered if he, too, would pass away, before some token had been granted to him that he was forgiven.

Rising from his stool, he stirred the dying embers. As they began to glow with renewed life, so his hopes, which had well-nigh flickered out, began again to spring in his breast, and as he lifted his furrowed face to the light, a smile broke over it and he said to himself, " He will come ! He *will* come ! "

## CHAPTER III.

### THE GIPSIES.

The two young fishermen prepared their tackle and baited their hooks. Then they dropped them into the deep water, and hopefully waited for the first bite.

They had dropped their anchor in the shadow of a mountain which rose almost straight up out of the fjord, and, although it was getting late, daylight had not quite disappeared, for it was nearly June, and in this month, in their latitude, " morning sits in the lap of night."

As the young men waited for their fish, which did not bite too eagerly, they could see the dark pine-wood through which Stefan had passed, and they spoke of the mysterious old man.

" I wonder how long he has lived there," remarked Stefan.

" Some years, I should think. He was there when we settled here, I believe," was Rolf's reply.

" But you have never seen him ? "

" Never ! Though I have wished to do so. Indeed, Lars and I have spoken of crossing over and seeking out the old man."

"Is Lars your brother?"

"No, he is my adopted father," answered the other. "We are bound together by a very strong tie. He is a fine specimen of the old Norseman—a man of splendid build, and of noble nature, too."

At this moment he exclaimed, "Ah!" and began to pull in his line, but found nothing at the end save disappointment. Yet the bait had been taken.

So more bait was fixed, and the line dropped once more, to be brought up very quickly with a good fat codling struggling at the end. Then their luck changed, and they became so much occupied, that they did not notice another boat coming towards them, with three men in it, and a woman in the stern. The boat came nearer and nearer. Rolf saw them first, and said to Stefan in an undertone,

"Be careful!"

Stefan turned, and as he did so one of the men shouted in a harsh voice,

"Good sport?"

"Yes."

"Any to spare?"

"No."

The woman gave a loud, harsh laugh. With a

shrill whistle the speaker turned his boat, and it was soon lost to sight in the gathering haze.

"Gipsies!" suggested Stefan.

"Mischief!" added Rolf. "I think we have fish enough. We had better row in now. I am anxious about Lars, as he is quite alone."

So they pulled up the anchor, and with their haul of fish were soon on shore. As Rolf was mooring the boat, he said to Stefan,

"You will stay with us to-night, and then cross in the morning, won't you?"

"I should be glad: then I can leave a meal for our friend, the hermit," was Stefan's reply.

"Good! Is that some one coming towards us?"

"Yes, a tall man, I think."

"Oh, it is Lars. I expect he is wondering why we are so late. I hope he hasn't seen that other boat."

Although Stefan had not met Lars before, his face seemed strangely familiar. When he heard of their encounter with the gipsies, the old man said, "If those fellows are in the neighbourhood, we may look out for trouble."

"I did not like that woman's laugh," Rolf remarked.

"She had an evil eye," added Stefan.

They now left the little beach, and soon reached a wooden hut entirely overgrown with moss, amongst which the harebells and forget-me-nots were beginning to show their delicate blue. During the frugal meal that followed, the young stranger told his experience with the lonely man on the other side of the fjord.

"What struck me most was that he looked as though he had suffered much. His brow was deeply furrowed; his eyes had a deeply thoughtful look, and told of sorrow, too."

"But he did not speak, did he?" asked Lars.

"No, but when I addressed him, he pressed his lips firmly together, as if resisting the temptation to do so. Another thing I noticed, as he pointed towards the west, was a deep scar on his right wrist."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lars, thoughtfully. "But I suppose that is nothing very unusual in an old Norwegian," he added, as if to himself.

They then retired for the few hours left for sleep. Early next morning, Stefan unmoored another small boat, gathered up his share of their catch of the night before, and, promising to return in a week's time, said good-bye and set out for home.

He had intended to leave a present of fish with the lone man, and usually this would have been possible; but to-day, on second thoughts, he was afraid to quit the boat, because of the gipsies being about, for he knew that they lived mainly by thieving. He thought it advisable, therefore, to take the longer way home and row round the promontory to the small hamlet where he lived.

He looked forward, however, with some impatience to his next fishing expedition, and, in the meantime, spent the days putting some finishing touches to a Norwegian seascape on which he was engaged; for he was an artist by profession, and a fisherman only for recreation.

On the day appointed, he found his friends awaiting him on the jetty that was the common property of the few peasants living near, who gained a scanty livelihood by catching and drying fish.

They enquired if he had heard anything of the gipsies; Lars seemed anxious to know if he had seen anything further of the hermit, and appeared disappointed when told that he had not.

The young men prepared the bait and tackle, and invited Lars to join them on the water. He was quite willing to do so; and they were soon once

more absorbed in waiting for the fish to bite, and drawing in the spoil, when they did.

Then of a sudden, and as if from nowhere, they heard the splash of oars at some little distance. Looking in the direction whence the sound came, they saw an old, almost paintless boat, with only one person in it.

This was a woman, who wore a bright scarlet scarf round her head, and a shawl of the same colour thrown loosely over her shoulders. She was not pulling at all hard, and had no need to, for a much-used sail carried the boat quickly towards them. The sight was so unusual that the men were silent, but alert.

As the boat neared them, they saw that the woman was young and strikingly beautiful. Her dark skin betokened a life in the open; and her flashing eyes gazed fixedly at Rolf, as her boat slowly passed theirs. Then it quickened its speed, and as its distance increased, they heard the rich notes of the familiar Norse song, *Jeg elsker dig*,* echoing and re-echoing among the hills.

" Surely that was not the woman who laughed at us the other night," said Stefan.

* "I love you."

"No, no," replied Rolf. "The boat evidently belongs to the gipsies. But surely she is not one of them!"

"I am afraid she is. How dreadful to think of a girl like that being mixed up with such a gang!" said the older man, sadly.

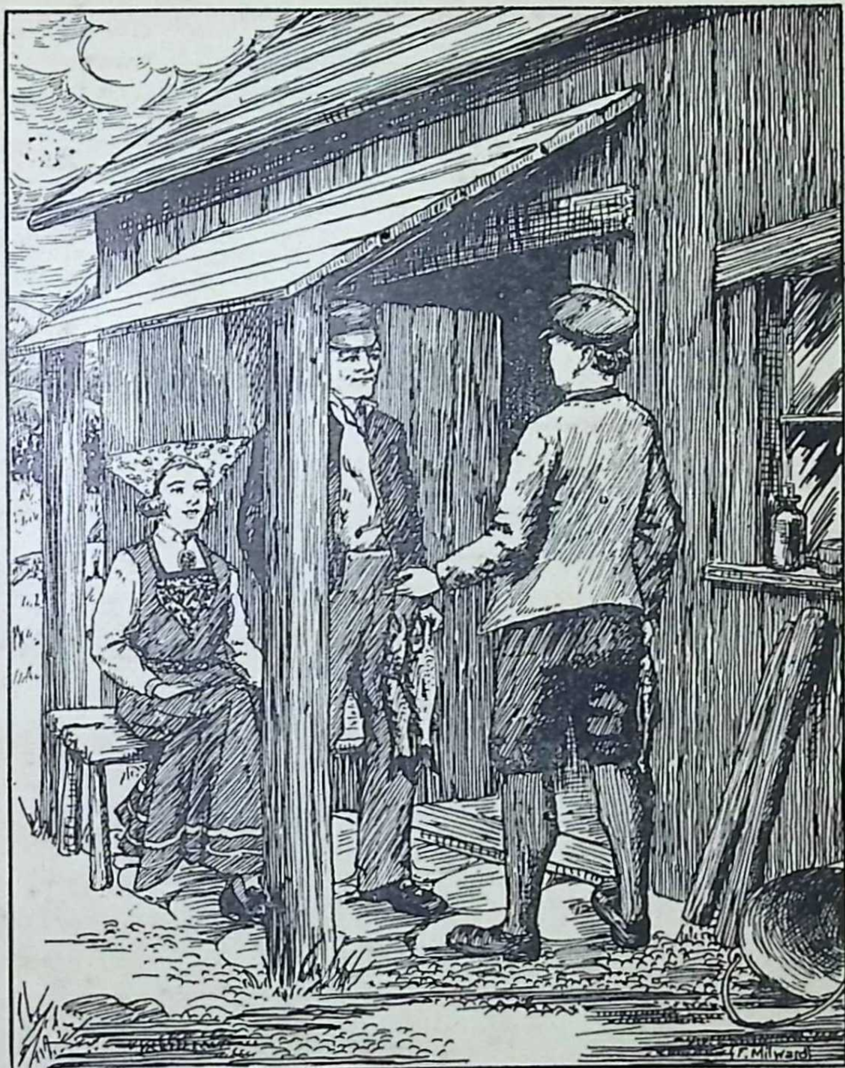
"She looks capable of holding her own with any man," remarked Rolf. "But what eyes! I can feel them fixed on me now."

"She certainly had none for anyone else," retorted Stefan, quickly. "I was so spellbound that I could only gaze at her."

Then, having decided that they had caught enough fish, Stefan asked if his friends would row him over to the other side and leave him there, so that he could return by way of the hermit's hut, and leave him a gift of fish.

Lars, in particular, seemed pleased to do this, but he bade his young friend make use of his eyes and ears, lest he should be taken unawares by the treacherous gipsies.

So Stefan left his friends, taking with him a fair haul of fish in a creel of willow twigs slung over his shoulders. The excitement of the last hours, and




'The old man sprang to his feet and smiled a welcome.'—*Page 20.*

the anticipation of the visit before him, gave buoyancy to his step, and he seemed to walk on air as he trod the thick carpet of pine needles under his feet.

Then he came to a point from which he could view the landscape behind him. The sun was just dipping into the sea, making it an ocean of gold, studded here and there with dark specks, and in the fulness of his heart he sang,

> There is no land in all the earth
> Like this dear land that gave me birth.

He once more entered the wood, which grew darker and darker, and he hoped that he would not lose his way this time, for he wished to reach home before midnight. To his relief, he presently smelt burning wood and tobacco smoke, and soon found himself approaching the hermit's hut, from the chimney of which the smoke was issuing.

To his surprise, he saw the old man sitting in his porch and, talking earnestly with him, was the beautiful young woman. He trod so lightly, and so softly, that he came upon them unawares; but when the old man saw him, he sprang to his feet and smiled a welcome. The young woman did not move; but, sitting there, she made such a picture as the artist would have loved to transfer to canvas.

" Will you honour me," said Stefan to the hermit, " by relieving me of a little of my burden ? "

The old man bowed graciously, but the young woman, looking mischievously at him, said,

" I am sure my friend wishes you would very often lighten your burden at his door."

The hermit smiled, looking indulgently at her, and the young man, saying he would remember, bowed low and set out for home.

# CHAPTER IV.

## GERD AND THE HERMIT.

"You see, Daddy," said the girl, whose name was Gerd, "since that night, five years ago, when you rescued me from the sea, I have felt a longing, more and more each year, to leave this life of my people; but, each time I mention it to Nicho, he storms so furiously that even I am afraid of him. And Mother, too, seems like one possessed. Though I long to get away, I dare not."

"Try to bear with them, my girl. Who knows but your influence may soften their hard natures, and the day may come when you will be thankful that you did not leave them entirely alone? At any rate, for your mother's sake, stay with them yet a little while longer."

"But their ways are so evil sometimes. Last night, I overheard them planning to set fire to a barn somewhere amongst these hills, and, during the confusion that would follow, to plunder the man's cottage, in which there are some valuable old silver cups."

At the word "silver" Johan gave a start.

" And yet they are never brought to justice for their thefts, are they ? " he asked.

" Only once have I known him caught," was Gerd's reply. " He knows how to dispose of his ill-gotten goods so that they cannot be traced."

" Could we not give warning ? " enquired the hermit.

" No, I fear not. I have no idea whether the cottage lies north, south, east, or west, or how far away. But, Daddy, why did you let that young man go away without uttering even a word to him ? "

" I may not tell you, child. At least, not yet," quietly replied the old man.

" I saw him out on the fjord with two other men," Gerd went on to say. " One was an old man, and at first I thought it was you. The other was young, and so handsome. I know I stared at him, because I am sure I have seen him in my dreams. He is like those heroes in the books that, long ago, you taught me how to read. Do you know who they are ? "

" No," answered the hermit. " When I fish, it is always on the other side of Svartnes, for, as you know, I always seek the lonely places. You are the

only person, except my old nurse, with whom I have talked for the last six years."

The girl looked enquiringly at him, but said no more.

These two were great friends, and had been so for five years, since—as she said—he had saved her from the sea. Nicho, the leader of the gang of gipsies, was her stepfather. She was only two years of age, when her mother had married this man, who, though a villainous ruffian, was, as a rule, kind and indulgent to his wife and her child. The mother never spoke of her child's father, but it was understood that he was a Spanish nobleman who had been lost on his way back to Spain. Certainly, the girl had something of a Spanish look.

One evening, Gerd, who, even at the age of twelve, was a skilled sailor, had taken their boat out on the water for a sail. A storm arose, and she lost control of her boat. It was seized by a sudden squall and completely overturned, the girl being underneath.

She regained the surface, however, and battled with the waves for some time. When almost exhausted, she felt a strong arm thrown round her, and knew no more until she found herself peacefully

reclining on a hard couch in Johan's cottage. He made her take a cup of hot coffee, and, after giving her an old rug, went out, telling her to change as quickly as possible and to dry her saturated clothes at the fire of logs which he had just kindled.

When he returned, he found her fast asleep, clad in her own dried garments; lying near her couch was the dog, Rap, on guard. She awoke, gazed around, and wondered what had become of the boat.

"The boat is all right, high and dry on the strand," he told her. She rested a little longer, and then, as she appeared anxious, he took her the nearest way to the little beach on the western side of Svartnes. There he helped her to embark, and expressed a desire to see her again.

Since then a great friendship had arisen between these two, for, in the not very frequent visits of her people to those parts, she had never missed an opportunity of seeing him; and he had aroused in her a desire to escape from the life of evil-doing into which her Mother was slowly sinking.

This woman was barely middle-aged. She had not been altogether a bad mother, and had given Gerd what little education she could. The child had devoured it and hungered for more. This

hunger, however, could not be satisfied, until she became acquainted with Johan.

Discovering the disposition of the girl, he had guided her mind into the right channels, and lent her the few books he possessed; these she had read with eagerness, and asked for more. This craving he had endeavoured to satisfy from his well-stored mind. He had never regarded the curse as applying to her sex, and he had, especially towards the end, talked freely with his old nurse.

The girl was very grateful. Though she could plainly see that there was something in his life he wished to hide, she asked no questions, and knew nothing of the past of the man whom she regarded with deep respect and affection.

Truly, sorrow had changed his nature, and the love for his boy, which, for a while, had seemed lost, now ruled his every thought and action.

On the evening which our story has reached, the old man and young girl talked on a little longer, and then he asked,

"Where did you leave your boat?"

"In your favourite harbour," she replied.

"You sailed round the point?"

"Yes, I was interested to see the fishers who

were anchored just round the point. But it is time I was getting back. There may be mischief brewing."

" I will walk to the boat," said Johan.

So they strolled down to the little landing. And when they parted, she promised to pay him another visit before her people left that neighbourhood.

Johan watched the girl's boat, as she rowed away, and having waved a final farewell, he turned his back on the fjord and made his way towards his cottage. It was a long, uphill walk; and, after the pleasant chat with Gerd, he felt more than usually lonely.

" I wonder if Gerd's mother ever wonders where her child spends her time during her long absences, when they encamp in this neighbourhood," he thought. From something that the girl had said, he gathered that she had not told any of the gipsies about her visits to him; and, as far as he knew, they had not come so far on the mainland as where his hut was. They usually hovered round the coast.

" That man Nicho is a desperate villain," thought Johan, " and yet the child seldom seems afraid. She is a courageous girl, but one does not dare to think of the future of a life like hers."

He had never seen the gipsies, except at a distance, although he had known of them, by hearsay, all his life. He knew that they lived by stealing, and that the arm of the law seemed rarely to reach them. But that this wonderfully beautiful girl should have to spend the best part of her life amongst them, filled him with dismay. He was thankful that he had been able to influence her in such a way that she would be loath to follow their evil example.

He turned to gaze on the wonderful panorama of islets and fjords stretching behind him, and could just make out her boat as a tiny speck in the distance. He almost shouted into the silence, " What—*what* can I do for her ? "

In his eagerness, he had not seen that he was not alone. On turning to pursue his way homeward, he beheld an aged and infirm man, apparently about his own age, who advanced towards him, and in trembling tones enquired the nearest way to the water, as he expected some one there to row him across to the island on the other side.

Johan, somewhat startled, drew himself up ; and, precisely as he had done in answer to Stefan, he extended his arm and pointed in silence to the now fading sunset. The stranger followed with his

eyes the direction indicated, and then turned them on Johan. For his part, the hermit was wondering who this stranger could be; was he one of the gipsies sent to spy out the chances of plunder? The two old men gazed fixedly at one another.

The stranger's face was almost covered with hair, and heavy eyebrows nearly hid his eyes. His hands, each of which held a stick, trembled as he said, "Sir, many thanks, many thanks." Immediately he turned and trudged off, leaving Johan strangely moved.

The hermit judged it best to get back to his hut without delay, and be on the alert; for, although he possessed nothing worth raiding, save the boat, still he did not desire an encounter with the lawless gipsy-folk. It was with a sigh of relief that he regained his hut, and found everything as he had left it, when he set out with Gerd. His walk up the hill left him exhausted; so he threw himself on to his couch, and soon fell asleep.

## CHAPTER V.

### MISCHIEF AFOOT.

In his sleep Johan dreamed. He thought that he was wandering in the forest, when, suddenly, from amongst the thickly-growing trees appeared the form of the old man whom he had met on his way home. As Johan gazed at him, the old man gradually grew taller and taller, and broader and broader, until he became an immense giant, with eyes that looked like flames, and his stick a huge and threatening club, which he was just raising aloft as if to strike, when Johan awoke.

It was already daylight. He jumped up, and, after lighting a fire and having his breakfast of fish and coffee, he resolved to return to his little harbour, get his boat out, and row round Svartnes to the spot to which he had directed the stranger on the previous evening. He seldom ventured round this point, but to-day he wished to see what might be going on beyond his own more retired arm of the fjord.

It was a gorgeous morning, and in the wonderful sunshine he soon threw off the unpleasant impression which his dream had left on his mind. As he pushed the boat down the pebbly beach, he looked

around him and said to himself, "It is good to be alive. What a glorious world this is!"

This morning, he seemed to have thrown off the burden of years. He was not really an old man, but the years of loneliness, and the memory of the wrong he had done to the two who had loved and trusted him, and the deep desire that they could be restored to him, had aged him before his time.

When he had pushed the boat into the rippling water, he jumped in and paddled out a little way. He would keep near the coast so as to see, without being seen.

As he skirted the promontory and rowed towards the strand, a feeling of disappointment came over him. Only the seagulls were about; so he returned to his loneliness, wondering when next the presence of the girl would brighten his dwelling.

And then he fell to thinking of the beautiful girl, and of the brave fight she was making against the evil influences around her. He wondered what would become of her.

He thought of her strange loneliness amongst those evildoers; and, taking out of his hip pocket a small revolver, he examined it carefully, and said to himself, "She must have this to carry with her

always. She may need it some day, and her life is of more value than mine."

When Gerd paid him a flying visit a few evenings later, he took the weapon from his pocket, and, much to her surprise, handed it to her, saying, " Gerd, the time may come when you will need such defence as this weapon alone can afford. Take it. Do you know how to use it ? "

Grasping the weapon firmly in her right hand, she replied, " Oh, yes, Daddy ! Nicho taught me how to use a revolver, when I was quite a child. He used to say he would not like to be the target at which I aimed."

" Does he possess such a weapon ? " asked the man anxiously.

" No, not now. He did ; but it was taken from him, when he was captured six years ago."

" And he has been caught only once ? " enquired Johan.

" Yes, only once, to my knowledge, and then he was let off very lightly. But I don't like to take this from you, Daddy. Have you another ? "

" Yes," he quickly replied.

This was not true, but he was quite confident



' He took the weapon from his pocket and handed it to her.'—*Page* 32.

that, had the girl known that he was parting with his only weapon, she would have refused it.

She was wearing a short warm coat, and, placing the revolver carefully in the inner pocket, she said, "Thank you, Daddy."

Then the man added, "But, girl, be careful, and use it only as a last resource."

"Do not be afraid," she said confidently. "It is in safe keeping with me."

Then she left him, promising a speedy return.

That night he could not sleep. He tossed from side to side on his hard couch, and then something seemed to compel him to rise, open his door, and look out. The night was dark. All was silent. He closed the door again, walked back to his couch, and a deep longing for his boy overcame him. He dropped to his knees, and prayed for his son's return. When he had finished, while still on his knees, he buried his face in the rugs, and dozed off again.

He was awakened by the sound, as it seemed, of a light tread on the fallen twigs outside his hut. He sprang to his feet, and turned towards the door, while his right hand sought his hip pocket, where, until to-night, he had carried his only weapon. In an instant he realized that he was defenceless. He

walked to the door, on which he kept his eyes fixed, and threw it boldly open.

But all was silent. There was no sign of anybody.

"Perhaps it was only my fancy," he thought. He closed the door, lay down again, and, tired out, was soon fast asleep.

The next few days he passed quite alone.

One evening, about a week later, a mist had settled over the water. Thinking that, should the plunderers have designs on his boat, this would be their opportunity, he strolled down to his boathouse to make sure that all was secure.

This little boathouse he and his old servant had put together, when they first settled on Svartnes; and the two men had spent almost as much time on the housing of the boat as on their own.

He found everything in order, locked up again, and took a few more steps to the edge of the water. The sun—like a great red ball through the mist—was just disappearing into the sea. How dreary and desolate it looked! With a shudder he was turning his back on it, when, out of the gloom, two lights suddenly appeared. These lights grew larger and larger, as if advancing towards him.

What could it be? Perhaps the gipsies! He would wait and see, and keep guard over his most valuable possession, his boat.

The lights came on and on, apparently aiming for the exact spot where he stood.

Then he heard a voice—the voice that he loved to hear.

"Well, good-bye! Many thanks for guidance. Once on land, I can find my way. Good-bye, once again!"

Then, to his surprise, he heard a reply in a man's voice.

"Good-bye for an hour. In an hour I shall be here again, waiting for you."

"Thank you!"

Then only one light was to be seen advancing towards him. In a few moments, the boat and the girl could be indistinctly made out through the mist.

"Is that you, Daddy?" he heard.

"I need not ask if it is Gerd," he said. "But why are you coming through the fog, and at this hour?"

"Oh, Daddy, aren't you pleased to see me? It seems so long since I was here."

"Yes, child, you know I am pleased to see you; and it *does* seem a very long time since you were here. But you did not come alone across the water?"

"No, the young fisherman, whom I told you about, insisted on coming with me."

"I thought there were two of them."

"I mean the one who lives over on the island."

"So you have made his acquaintance?" said Johan.

"Yes. I am afraid I am in for a good scolding, when I have told you how it happened."

"You had better let me hear the story, and then I shall know whether to scold you or not."

They were walking up the hill towards the wood. The girl had taken the old man's arm.

"Well, one evening last week," she began, "I was coming here; and as I rowed dreamily along towards the other side of Svartnes, I heard the strains of my favourite song, *Jeg elsker dig*, sung by a most lovely tenor voice. I could not help it, Daddy, but I felt I must sing it too. So I joined in. Then the voice grew nearer and nearer, and presently the man's boat was alongside mine. Not altogether to my surprise, I saw the young fisherman."

The old man looked anxiously down on the girl, and in the fading light could see that her eyes shone brightly, and that her cheeks were flushed.

"Well, what followed?" asked Johan.

"He lifted his cap and said, 'This is not the first time that I have heard your beautiful voice.'"

"And you did not come to me that evening?" remarked Johan.

"No."

"Is the young man just an ordinary fisherman?"

"I should hardly think so. He talks as you talk, and altogether he reminds me of you. I think he lives with his father across the fjord, and he knows that I am one of the wanderers now encamped on the island."

"What is Nicho doing now?"

"I don't know. They are up to some mischief, I expect, but Mother would not join them this time, so she and I are alone for a while. They are returning shortly, and I came to-night to warn you to be on your guard; before they started off, I heard them talking and jeering about you."

By this time, they had reached the hut, and Johan made the girl sit down, as she seemed strangely excited. Then he told her of the mysterious visitor,

who had enquired his way, and she was much disturbed to hear this.

"But I do not think he could have been one of our gang; it is not their way of going on. Besides they are all away."

"What could they gain by attacking me? There is only my boat," said Johan.

"Well, of course, that is much, but I heard Nicho say, 'There is gold—gold—gold, heaps and heaps of it.'"

"Gold, heaps and heaps of it! Well, perhaps! But not here, Gerd, not here! It is only the boat I care about. I should fare badly, if they got that."

"But, Daddy, I thought you were a very poor man."

"My child," he said, looking nervously at her, and lighting his pipe with a trembling hand, "I have often felt I ought to tell you the story of my life, and now you shall have it in as few words as possible." Then he told her why he was living in solitude on Svartnes, and during the narrative her great expressive eyes never left his face.

When he had finished, the girl rose, put her hand on his shoulder, and in a tone of sympathy she said,

"Poor old Daddy! You did a great wrong; but

you have suffered much. How you must long to see that boy again!"

"Sometimes I cry out in my longing, and implore that he may be given back to me. But, child, I fear you have outstayed your hour. I will walk with you towards your boat. Does your friend know of me?"

"Yes, I have spoken of you as a good old man who has been more than a father to me, and who, by his kindness and wisdom, has helped me to rise out of the life to which I was born."

They strolled down the hill almost without a word. Then they heard a voice on the water, softly singing *Solveig's Song*, and it had just reached the words,

Here shall I wait till thou comest again,
Thou comest again.

The girl's sadness gave place to gladness, and, saying to Johan, "I will come to-morrow evening early, and stay a long time—good-bye!" she quickly left him. In a very little while, he could hear her voice sweetly mingling with that of her companion in the refrain of the song.

Then he heard the splashing of the oars, as the two boats set out homewards. "What a home for

such a girl!" he said to himself. "I should like to have seen the young fellow, and to-morrow I will try to do so. Gerd is a sensible girl; but she has no one but me to watch over her, and see that she does not waste her affection on one unworthy."

He reached his hut, locked his door, and tried to settle for the night. But he could not rest. His brain was excited, and it was daybreak before he sank into a heavy sleep, from which he did not wake until the sun was quite high in the sky.

Gerd was anxious to reach home, for she knew that the men were returning shortly. It might be to-night, especially as the mist still lay on the water, for it was such nights as this that they chose to do their dark deeds.

Her heart was heavy again, for the story to which she had listened made her very sad, especially as she felt how powerless she was to help the man to whom she owed so much. For his sake she must be on the alert; for she felt sure that, on the return of the gipsies, their attention would be turned towards him.

Should she tell Rolf? How she wished she could take the strong fearless young man into her confidence. But, no! Johan had said, "No one knows, and no one may know, who I am." And

when she had protested, "How can your boy find you, if you hide from your fellowmen, as you are doing?" he had replied; "When I have made amends for my crime, the Power that watches over me will direct his footsteps."

So the secret was for her ears alone, though she strongly suspected that Nicho had found out some of it. She must be all the more on the watch; for, although the men stood in awe of her—she knew not why—she could not keep them from their evil-doing, if once they had completed their plans.

When she said farewell to Rolf, he had asked her, "Shall we meet to-morrow?" and she had told him, "Yes, to-morrow evening, when the sun is low, I shall cross to Svartnes."

She found her mother alone, and fast asleep on a bed of straw, in an outhouse lent by a peasant who was secretly in league with the gipsies. The men were not particular, and could sleep anywhere.

Gerd's couch was a strong shelf, on which she had flung a generous supply of hay and straw. To-night she quickly climbed to this, and, in spite of her previous anxiety, was fast asleep as soon as she laid her head down. But this sleep was not to last long. She suddenly awoke, and, glancing towards

her mother's bed, she saw that it was empty. Then she heard the woman and Nicho talking in hushed tones, and her sharp ears caught the words, " No luck," uttered by the man in sulky tones.

Then her mother's laugh told the girl that mischief was afoot, so she pricked up her ears and heard,

" Well, lass, been doing anything ? "

" Yes."

" Good. Well ? "

" No sign of money, or anything else worth taking ; but there is the boat ! "

" No sign of money ? "

" Not any, unless he keeps it hidden under his waistcoat. He wraps himself in a thick blanket, when he lies down, and covers himself with fur rugs." Then, in still lower tones, " But you must be careful."

" What for ? " growled the man.

" Well, he's got a little toy hidden away in his pocket, that you won't like the sound of. I nearly heard its music the other night."

" Tell on," said the man savagely.

" Yes, you may well say, ' Tell on.' I'll tell on,

and I'll tell you—you can get some one else to do your dirty work after this is through. I've done with it."

"What happened?"

"Well, to please you, I travelled up there, through that dark forest, night after night, for nigh a fortnight. I never set eyes on a soul till one night I saw an old man bent with age, making his way towards the water's edge. He did not see me; I took care of that; and his eyes were bent on the ground."

"Who was he?"

"Don't know. Never set eyes on him before, but think he must be one of those fish-curers on the other side of the water."

"Can he be a friend of Old Quicksilver?"

"Very likely."

"Are you sure it wasn't Old Quicksilver himself?"

"Quite. He is as straight and upright as you are."

"But meeting an old man wouldn't make you afraid."

"Well, it gave me a bit of a shock, but still I did

your bidding several nights after that, and only found out that when it grows dark—too dark for him to read—he just sits smoking and dreaming. Then, one night, as I neared the hut, I heard a voice."

"A voice—a man's voice?" asked Nicho in surprise.

"Yes, a man's voice—his own voice—raised as if in earnest prayer. I could not catch anything he said except the words, 'Send him back! Send him back!' I was so surprised that I stood stock still, afraid to move, and listening for more. But no more came, and all was still as the grave. It was pitch dark, too, but I gathered up my courage, and groped round for my usual peephole in the door. Through this I could just see him on his knees."

"The right place for him! He ought to live there," growled the man surlily. "Get on."

"That's what I'm trying to do. Well, I must have made a slight sound, for, suddenly, he sprang to his feet, and, putting his hand to his hip pocket, turned towards the door. I didn't wait to see what he had there. But it wasn't gold, that I can tell you."

"Well?"

"Well, I'm thankful to be alive to tell the tale."

"But where's the gold?"

"He's got no gold there, unless he keeps it hidden under his waistcoat."

"We want to get that plaything," muttered the man.

At these words, the girl's hand slipped under the pillow and felt the coveted weapon.

"Yes, and get a bullet through your heart," was the woman's reply.

Then the voices grew indistinct. The man and woman had evidently wandered out of danger of being overheard.

Before long, however, the woman returned: presently Gerd knew by her snores that, for a while, she would be out of mischief.

The girl felt certain that they were planning an attack on her old friend, but for the present she would just watch and wait. She knew that for the day, at least, he would be safe, for the men would sleep till nightfall. Then she must take Rolf into her confidence, and they must be prepared to defeat her stepfather's plans. She rose very early; going to the stream for water, she saw that the men—seven in number—were fast asleep, lying on loose straw scattered about the yard.

# CHAPTER VI.

## TO THE RESCUE.

It was broad daylight when Johan awoke; so he threw open the door, and, after a light breakfast, stepped out into the open. The pines grew thick about his hut, but he could tell by the glint of the sun through the branches that it was a glorious morning. His mind occupied with Gerd and her reception of his story, he walked down to his little harbour. When he had left the wood behind him, and found how very bright was the day, he thought, " This will probably end in cloud and perhaps rain. She won't come until after sunset; so, this evening, I will have two or three hours out on the water and see if I can catch fish for winter storage."*

After seeing that his boat and tackle were all right, and carefully securing the lock, he took a longer and less direct route homeward than was his custom; for he was feeling lighter at heart than for some time past. Nothing unusual disturbed the perfect stillness and beauty of the scene. Only a small boat was skimming over the water to the island

* A great deal of dried fish is consumed by the peasantry of this country, and much is exported to Spain and other Roman Catholic countries of Europe.

on the other side. Its occupant waved and shouted to him, and he knew that it was Stefan.

"Off for an afternoon's fishing! Odd, if he calls to leave some for me while I am away!" he thought.

With a mind strangely at ease he took his usual afternoon's rest, and at five o'clock set out in his boat to the most unfrequented spot on his arm of the fjord, and dropped his anchor. After going through the necessary preparations, he threw out his line and waited. Very quickly he felt it quivering, and, on pulling up, found a fine haddock.

He had anchored not far from land, and was still in sight of his little beach. So much occupied was he that he did not see a woman's eyes directed towards him from over one of the large boulders just above his boathouse. She watched him for some time. Then she stole back through the pine-wood, tried the door of his hut, and, finding it locked, ran down to her boat on the other side. Not daring to row straight across, she rounded the island, and landed near her little settlement. She fixed her boat between two rocks, and hurried to the place where the men were still fast asleep. She immediately roused them, and then the woman and the

seven men had a talk together, which resulted in an evil laugh from the woman, and cunning, malicious glances from the men.

"Where is Gerd?" she asked.

"We have been too busy snoring, to take much notice of her," was the answer. "But she seemed in rare good humour, this morning, when we woke up for breakfast. What has she been doing lately?"

"She never tells me anything, and I let her go and come as she likes."

"You give her too free a hand," said Nicho sulkily.

"I never bother. She takes no notice of any of us," the woman replied.

Apparently the man was not quite satisfied, but all he said was, "Keep your eye on the girl."

They did not see the girl steal away, almost crawl through the thick bracken and bushes, climb over the brow of the hill, and run down until, exhausted and breathless, she reached the hut where lived Rolf and his adopted father.

She knocked quickly on the door, which was opened by the old man. When she saw him so near, the girl gave a start; and he, not knowing the

cause of her surprise, said, " Is anything the matter, my girl ? "

" Yes—yes, there is much the matter ! I want the young man, Rolf, who lives here."

" He has just gone down to the boat, and is, I believe, going out on the water with his young friend from Svartnes. He said he should not be away long. Will you wait ? "

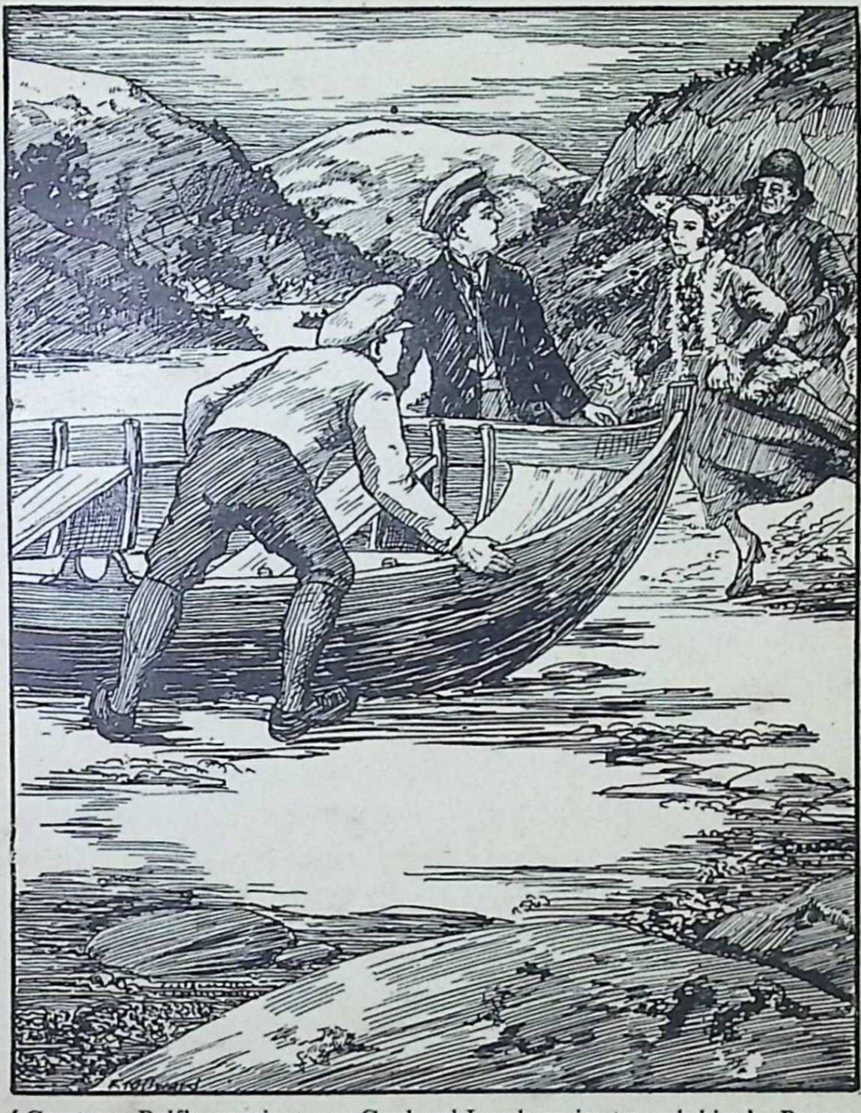
" No—no, I must find him. There is no time to wait. An old man over there is in great danger, and I must save him."

" Is it the hermit you mean ? "

" Yes, it is. The gipsies are after him, for they think he has gold, and he is all alone, over there," she said, pointing excitedly. " Oh, sir, won't you help us find Rolf ? "

The man re-entered the hut, but returned directly. They now almost ran down the little hill; on reaching the beach, they found Rolf and Stefan just pushing their boat into the water, intending to spend an hour or two, not in fishing, but just floating lazily with the tide.

Great was Rolf's surprise, on turning round, to see Gerd and Lars hurrying towards him, especially



'Great was Rolf's surprise to see Gerd and Lars hurrying towards him.'—*Page* 50.

as he was expecting to meet the girl on the fjord at sundown.

"Johan, the hermit, is in danger!" she almost gasped. "The gipsies are after him! Not a moment is to be lost!"

Rolf sprang to her side, saying to Lars,

"You and Stefan take the other boat, row straight across, make for his hut, and wait there for us."

With that, he and Gerd jumped into the boat already in the water, and rowed quickly out towards the point, shouting as they went, "We will go round to his boathouse, to catch him that way, and will join you as quickly as possible."

The boat, rowed by the two of them, sped rapidly over the water. Gerd looked round to Rolf once, and, tapping the pocket in her coat, she said, her eyes gleaming,

"I've got something here that will frighten them, if they give me cause. *He* gave it to me, saying, 'Your need for it is greater than mine: take it, but do not use it, unless really necessary.'"

"You had better let me have it," said Rolf quickly.

"No, I can mark the leader, and my aim is sure," was Gerd's reply.

They had gained the point and rounded it, but no one was in sight in any direction. The boat-house was locked; so, as they had promised, they set out to walk up the hill to the hermit's hut. On arriving there, they found, to their dismay, that it was also locked; and Lars and Stefan were waiting anxiously for them. They called and knocked; but, receiving no reply, they resolved to go back—Rolf and Gerd to their boat, for the girl knew Johan's favourite fishing ground, and Lars and Stefan to theirs, in order to follow round the point as quickly as possible.

* * * * * *

Not being satisfied with his success, Johan had pulled up his anchor and altered his position several times. At last he settled and, for a while, was kept very busy. But the time passes very quickly to a fisherman; and night was beginning to fall, when he took up his oars and turned to look behind him. To his surprise, he saw two boats advancing slowly in his direction. This was unusual; for, as a rule, he had this remote corner of the fjord all to himself. Thinking it might be Gerd—the boats were still some distance away—he let down his line again. Then, looking ahead, he saw two more boats creeping towards him from the opposite direction. Somewhat

alarmed he pulled up his line, then his anchor; and, by that time, the first arrival had come near enough for the man in it to strike Johan's boat with his oar, saying, " Having a good time, old man ? "

" Yes, but your coming here won't help me. What do you want ? "

The reply was a rude laugh, and a shout to the men in the three other boats, which now approached quickly.

Then Johan saw himself hemmed in by four boats, containing seven men in all, while he was alone in his boat in the midst of them.

He was no coward, and did not fear death. He had sinned, indeed, and sinned deeply, but he had done his utmost to make amends. He looked round at the hills he loved, then at the cruel faces of the men so near. Closing his eyes for an instant as if to gather strength, he heard distinctly the voice that he had heard but once before.

" Fear not, Johan ! The help thou least expectest is at hand."

He opened his eyes, and then heard the harsh voice of the man who had spoken to him, and who was evidently Nicho, the ringleader.

"Deliver up your gold, and we will let you off with your boat," said he.

"I have no gold," was Johan's reply.

"Did you not turn your silver-mines into gold? Those mines that you stole from your brother!"

The old man gave a start, and spoke not a word.

"We know you did; but we don't mind accepting stolen property."

Still Johan was dumb.

"Take off your waistcoat, old man. We know where you keep it."

Still no answer! The old man was staring beyond them, and did not move.

"Take off your waistcoat, I say, or we'll take it off for you," shouted the ruffian.

Then he caught Johan's boat with his oar and leapt into it, and, though meeting with greater resistance than he had expected, he soon stripped the old man of the coveted waistcoat. Throwing it into the nearest boat, and lifting his hand, in which he grasped a knife, he shouted,

"Row to where Martha is. I'll finish here."

"You will have to kill me first. Down with that

knife, or I will shoot you," and he felt a revolver pressed against his temple.

The girl and her companion had arrived just in time; and before Rolf could prevent her, she had sprung into the boat. Getting between the ruffian and his victim, she had thrown the bully and coward entirely off his guard, and he dropped his weapon. Finding himself thus baffled, he turned to his followers, but saw that they were hastening to carry out his order. In the twinkling of an eye he was back in his own boat and rowing away with utmost speed.

# CHAPTER VII.

## AFTER YEARS OF SORROW.

The old man, now almost unconscious, whispered, " Let them go," and swooned in Rolf's arms. The girl, taking the limp hands in her own warm ones, said caressingly, " This is the old man to whom I can never pay my debt."

" And this is the man for whom Lars and I have been searching during the last five years. To think of his living on Svartnes all the time! This is my father."

" Your father!" exclaimed Gerd, in amazement.

" Yes. Lars is really my uncle, my father's brother. His name is Sven Larsen, and mine Olaf Larsen."

" But I thought it was Rolf!"

" No! Rolf is only a fancy name given me by my uncle, with whom I was always a favourite. Even as a child, he used to call me Rolf the Rover—I suppose, because I was often roving and very frequently lost. But here they come! They have not wasted any time. I wonder what he will say when he sees the hermit."

The two other rescuers were alongside, and Lars, looking admiringly at the girl, said, " We saw it all. You are a very brave girl! "

" No, not brave. It was my love for him that gave me courage," she answered softly. Then Sven Larsen gave his attention to the hermit, who, still unconscious, was lying on a sail in the bottom of the boat.

" The hermit of Svartnes is my brother Johan," said Sven Larsen. " I discovered it a week ago."

" You discovered it and did not tell me ? " cried Rolf.

" It is true, but I had intended telling you to-day, even if this had not happened. But we seem to have forgotten the criminals. Are you going to let them escape ? "

" Yes," answered Gerd. " He said, ' Let them go,' and at any rate they are out of our reach by this time. They had everything in readiness for instant flight, even if this attempt had been successful."

" Would they leave you behind ? " asked Sven.

" I don't think they would take any thought of me at such a time."

" You will not follow them ? "

" No, never again, although I know where they are going to. I shall look after him," she said, pointing to Johan. And then they saw that his eyes were wide open, staring at each in turn.

" Am I in a dream, Gerd ? " he asked feebly.

" No dream, Daddy ! You said he would come, you know." The young man had bent over his father ; they looked at each other, but neither uttered a word.

Then, with returning strength, the hermit got upon his feet, and faced his brother.

" Sven, brother ! I have made enquiries all over the world for you, that I might give you back your own. For six years have I waited. Dare I now ask your forgiveness ? "

" Yes, brother, you have it already," was the immediate reply.

" Have you lived long overseas ? " asked the hermit.

" For more than four years. When Rolf found me out there in Mexico, he persuaded me to return to our dear old country. I had heard a strange story about your having left your mines and retired to some lonely spot ; so I hoped that by returning with the boy we might meet again.

It was only recently that I heard, from our young friend here," —pointing to Stefan, who was busy disentangling the tackle, and wishing himself at home in his studio—" it was only recently that I heard of the hermit of Svartnes; and I should not, for a moment, have supposed him to have anything to do with you, had he not mentioned the scar on your right wrist. Then I wondered; and, to satisfy my curiosity, I visited you that night as a peasant. When I set eyes on you again, although I did not hear your voice, I must have been granted almost more than human strength, to leave you as I did."

" How little did I dream that this happiness was at my very door!" said Johan.

Then he turned to the young people, and a sudden happy smile lighted up his face.

" Olaf, my son, she calls me Daddy," he said. " She has been my great comfort during these long years of regret."

" Yes, Father, I know," was all he said; but he looked at the girl, and Johan did not say more.

In this part of the world the twilights linger, but they do come to an end, and it was now almost dark.

Stefan, who had brought about this reunion, excused himself, and, taking one of the three boats,

said, "Good night!" and rowed away. Sven remained with his brother, while Rolf and Gerd were in the other boat; and so they returned to Johan's little beach.

But the girl would not land. She said she could not rest until she had seen that the gipsies had got clear away; for, after all, one of them was her mother, and she had lived with them all her life.

So she and Rolf rowed away, leaving the two old men alone to talk over the past and to form plans for the future. The young people once more rounded Svartnes, and took the route to that part of the island where the gipsies had been staying.

Leaving the boat on the beach, they went together to find how things were, and great was their surprise to see a dim light shining through the open door of the barn.

The girl advanced quickly; on entering, she saw her mother lying on the bed of straw, and sobbing bitterly.

"Mother, Mother, what is the matter? Why are you here?" asked the girl in softened tones.

"Am I not your mother? You are my child, not his. I was afraid you wouldn't come back, and that is why I am here."

" And I only wanted to see what was happening," explained Gerd.

" Are you leaving me, girl ? "

" Yes, Mother, I have done with that life. I am going to start afresh. I have friends here who will help me." Turning, she placed her little hand in Rolf's great strong one.

At that moment the woman looked up ; turning her still beautiful eyes on Rolf's face, she said, " That's the old man's son."

" Yes, Mother, that is the son of the good old man whose life you planned to destroy."

Taking no notice of the latter part of the girl's speech, the woman continued, " I could have told you that four years ago. You will be rich lass ! "

" Not I, Mother, but I believe he will be."

Then, Rolf, bending towards the girl, said, " What will be mine will be yours, Gerd. Won't you tell your mother so ? "

But the girl did not reply. She only walked to the door, and gazed out at the star-lit sky. Then turning, she said to Rolf, " I shall stay here to-night. You will go back to your father."

The young man, feeling that enough had been said and that the girl was exhausted, said, " Good

night ! " and had soon joined the old men in Johan's cottage, where they settled until the morning.

Next day, when he rowed across the fjord, he found Gerd alone on the beach. Her mother, satisfied that her child was in safe keeping, had followed the gipsy band.

Then Rolf told the girl that, from the moment when the echo of her singing had come back to him from the hills, his heart had gone out to her.

When he asked, " Shall we go together now, and tell my father that he is soon to become your real Daddy ? " the girl did not refuse.

So the wanderers came into their own again, and love entered once more into the life of the hermit of Svartnes.

# QUESTIONS.

**Chapter II.**—1. Relate the events in Johan's life which led up to his living in the pine forest in Svartnes.

2. Who accompanied him when he first went there? How did he come to be utterly alone?

3. Olaf said to his father, "I will travel the whole world over." Write an account of some adventure he might have had between leaving home and finding his father again.

4. Do you think it was right or wrong for Olaf to leave his father as he did? Give reasons for your opinion.

**Chapter III.**—1. Describe the first meeting of Stefan and Rolf with the gipsies.

**Chapter IV.**—1. Who was Gerd? How was it that she had become so friendly with the hermit?

2. In what way was the hermit very helpful to Gerd?

3. Who, do you think, was the old stranger who met Johan? Why do you suppose he had come there?

**Chapter V.**—1. Relate the substance of the conversation which Gerd overheard between her mother and Nicho.

**Chapter VI.**—1. Suppose you had been Gerd. What would you have done when you knew that the gipsies intended to attack Johan?

2. Describe the fight between Johan and the gipsies.

**Chapter VII.**—1. Imagine yourself to be Rolf, and write an account of the rescue of Johan from the gipsies, and of his meeting with Sven.

**General.**—1. Which person in the book do you like best? Give your reasons.

2. Look at the picture on page 2, and then write a short description of the scenery of the coast of Norway.

2. What part does Stefan play in the story?

4. On two occasions Johan heard the "Earth Goddess" speak to him. What were those occasions, and what were the words spoken on each?

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